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ABSTRACT

This document represents a compilation of newspaper articles analyzing information shared by the Secret Service concerning 37 school shootings. The findings are presented to educate parents and teachers concerning what has been learned about violent students. It was determined that there is no profile of a typical youth who kills. The shooter is neither impulsive nor spontaneous, but sees the shooting as a way to solve a problem. The shooters told friends of their grievances and shared information about the violence they planned. Acquiring weapons was never a problem, since most youth had access to weapons in their homes. The articles point to the inherent problems associated with the current response schools are using to counter school shootings. They warn about over-reliance on metal detectors, SWAT teams, and zero-tolerance policies. Suggestions are made about the importance of listening to students; how to deal fairly with bullying; how to improve the school climate; the need to keep guns away from children; and the importance of investigating when a student raises a concern. The articles in Part 1 examine actions of the shooters; discuss bullying; and present tips on listening. In Part 2 they look at schools' responses and provide additional resources. (JDM)

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Chicago Sun-Times

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In their own words, the boys who have killed in America's schools offer a simple suggestion to prevent it from happening again: Listen to us.

DEADLY LESSONS

SCHOOL SHOOTERS TELL WHY

SUN-TIMES EXCLUSIVE REPORT
OCT. 15-16, 2000

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MIDWEST'S BEST-READ NEWSPAPER

Chicago Sun-Times

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A LETTER FROM THE MANAGING EDITOR

We are pleased to share with you these articles, which we believe every parent and teacher should read.

The towns are familiar – Littleton, Jonesboro, Paducah – the details of the cases have not been analyzed before now. The Secret Service has completed an analysis of 37 school shootings, and shared its results with the Chicago Sun-Times.

The findings of the study demand the attention of every adult.

• There is no profile of a typical child who kills. The shooters come from many types of families, from all incomes, from all races, from all academic backgrounds. No easy explanations—mental illness, drugs, video games—explain their actions. No profile rules anyone in or out.

• The shooters did not snap. These attacks were neither spontaneous nor impulsive. The shooters usually had chosen targets in advance: students, principals and teachers. This may give adults time to prevent an attack.

• Many of these children saw the killing as a way to solve a problem, such as to stop bullying by other children.

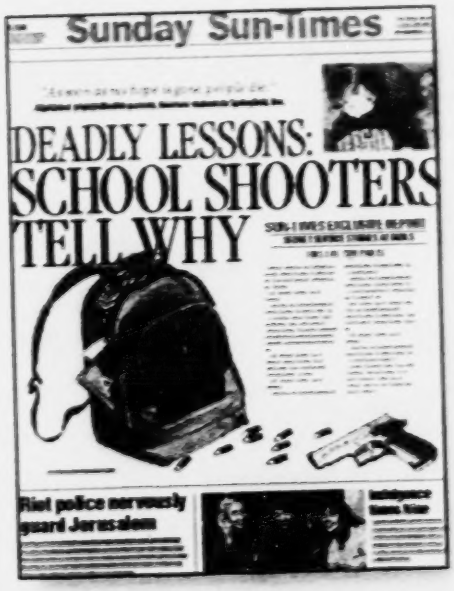
• The shooters told their friends of their grievances, and often told someone of the violence they planned. Those who knew in advance sometimes egged on the shooters, and rarely told any adult.

• The students had no trouble acquiring weapons, usually bringing them in from home.

These cases are disturbing, but the results of the Secret Service study overturn stereotypes and offer hope that many school shootings can be prevented.

The authors of the study also raise questions about the responses that many schools have taken to school shootings. They warn of over-reliance on metal detectors, SWAT teams, profiles, warning signs and checklists, zero-tolerance policies and software.

The answer, the researchers believe, lies more in listening to children, dealing fairly with grievances such as bullying, improving the climate of communication in schools, keeping guns away from children, and investigating promptly and thoroughly when a student raises a concern.


Sunday Sun-Times

DEADLY LESSONS: SCHOOL SHOOTERS TELL WHY

Riot police nervously guard Jerusalem

Consider Evan Ramsey, who killed the principal and another student in Bethel, Alaska, when he was 16 years old.

Q. "If the principal," Ramsey was asked, "had called you in and said, 'This is what I'm hearing,' what would you have said?"

A. "I would have told him the truth."

Joycelyn Winnecke
Managing Editor
Chicago Sun-Times

PART 1
SUNDAY, OCTOBER 15, 2000

Deadly lessons: School shooters tell why

By Bill Dedman
Chicago Sun-Times

WASHINGTON — In their own words, the boys who have killed in America's schools offer a simple suggestion to prevent it from happening again: Listen to us.

"I told everyone what I was going to do," said Evan Ramsey, 16, who killed his principal and a student in remote Bethel, Alaska, in 1997. He told so many students about his hit list that his friends crowded the library balcony to watch. One boy brought a camera. "You're not supposed to be up here," one girl told another. "You're on the list."

Researchers from the Secret Service have completed a detailed analysis of 37 school shootings. They reviewed case files and interviewed 10 of the shooters. The Secret Service shared the results of its Safe School Initiative with the Chicago Sun-Times.

As it turns out, kids at school usually knew what would happen because the shooters had told them, but the bystanders didn't warn anyone. That disturbing pattern gives hope: If kids plan, there is time to intervene. If kids tell, teachers or parents might be able to learn what a student is planning—if they take time to ask.

Together, the school shooters make a diverse class portrait. They are white, black, Hispanic, Asian, Native Alaskan. They were in public schools and Christian schools. Few had a mental illness, although many were desperate and depressed.

The shooters do share one characteristic: They are all boys.

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Kip Kinkel killed his parents, then two students in Springfield, Ore.

As a Secret Service consultant says, "If every parent went away from this, not worrying that their boy is going to kill someone, but listening and paying attention to depression, we'd be better off." ■

Examining the actions of an adolescent killer

By Bill Dedman
Chicago Sun-Times

WASHINGTON – What type of kids kill at school?

That's the wrong question, say researchers from the Secret Service.

The people who protect the president have spent the last year studying the rare but frightening events known as school shootings. The Secret Service studied the cases of 41 children involved in 37 shootings at their current or former school, from 1974 to 2000. It shared its findings with the Chicago Sun-Times and plans to publish a guide of advice for schools.

The Secret Service researchers read shooters' journals, letters and poetry. They traveled to prisons to interview 10 of the shooters, who sat for the video camera in orange prison jump suits, all acne and handcuffs, more sad than evil.

"It's real hard to live with the things I've done," said Luke Woodham, now 19, who killed two students in Pearl, Miss., in 1997.

The researchers found that killers do not "snap." They plan. They acquire weapons. They tell others what they are planning. These children take a long, planned, public path toward violence.

And there is no profile.

Some lived with both parents in "an ideal, All-American family." Some were children of divorce, or lived in foster homes. A few were loners, but most had close friends.

Few had disciplinary records. Some had honor roll grades and

ASSOCIATED PRESS

An interview with Luke Woodham, who killed his mother and two students in Pearl, Miss:

Q. Did any grown-up know how much hate you had in you?
A. No.

Q. What would it have taken for a grown-up to know?
A. Pay attention. Just sit down and talk with me.

Q. What advice do you have for adults?
A. I think they should try to bond more with their students. . . . Talk to them. . . . It doesn't have to be about anything. Just have some kind of relationship with them.

Q. And how would you have responded?
A. Well, it would have took some time before I'd opened up. If we kept talking . . . I would have . . . said everything that was going on.

were in Advanced Placement courses; some were failing. Few showed a change in friendships or interest in school.

"What caused these shootings, I don't pretend to know, and I don't know if it's knowable," said Robert A. Fein, a forensic psychologist with the Secret Service. "We're looking for different pieces of the puzzle, not for whether kids wore black clothes."

Looking for a type of child – a profile or checklist of warning signs – doesn't help a principal or teacher or parent who has vague information that raises a concern. Having some of the same traits as school shooters doesn't raise the risk, there being so few cases for comparison.

"Moreover, the use of profiles carries a risk of over-identification," the Secret Service says in its report. "The great majority of students who fit any given profile will not actually pose a risk of targeted violence."

Instead of looking for traits, the Secret Service urges adults to ask more questions, and quickly, about behavior and communication: What has this child said? Does he have grievances? What do his friends know? Does he have access to weapons? Is he depressed or despondent?

These questions are not posed from the traditional law enforcement perspective–has the student broken a rule or law?–or even from a mental health perspective–what is the diagnosis?

The uselessness of a profile is made clear by Barry Loukaitis, 14, who walked to junior high school on the coldest day of 1996 in Moses Lake, Wash. Under his trench coat he hid a .30/.30 rifle, which he used to kill two students and a teacher.

"His behavior did not appear obviously different from that of other early adolescents," wrote a psychiatrist who examined Loukaitis, "until he walked into his junior high school classroom and shot four people, killing three people."

But Loukaitis' behavior was different. He had spoken often, to at least eight friends, for as much as a year, of his desire to kill people.

He had asked his friends how to get ammunition. He had shopped for a long coat to hide the gun; unknowing, his mother took him to seven stores to shop for the right one. He had complained of teasing, but no teacher intervened. His poems were filled with death.

Many teenagers write frightening poetry. Loukaitis also told his friends just what he planned.

"He said that it'd be cool to kill people," one said. "He said he could probably get away with it."

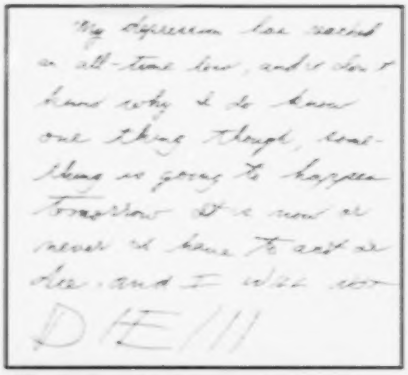
Q. How long ago was this?

A. For the last year, probably. I didn't think anything of it.

Q. And when he showed you the sawed-off shotgun?

A. I kind of blew that off, too.

The teacher Loukaitis killed, Leona Caires, 49, had written on the report card of the A student: "pleasure to have in class."



"My depression has reached an all-time low, and I don't know why. I do know one thing though, something is going to happen tomorrow."

Journals, poetry scream of violence, despair

Voices of the killers are seldom heard. Here are excerpts from poems by two boys before the shootings.

Suicide or homicide
Homicide and suicide
Into sleep I'm sinking
Why me I'm thinking
homicidal and suicidal
thoughts, intermixing
My life's not worth fixing

A second poem:

He loses his lust for life and
becomes more dangerous
He kills with the cold
ruthlessness of a machine
And surrenders the
satisfaction of reflection ■

Why is the Secret Service studying school shootings?

The Service once believed in profiles. Assassins were presumed to be male, loners, insane. That profile was changed by Squeaky Fromme and Sara Jane Moore, who each tried to kill President Gerald R. Ford in San Francisco in 1975. The night before Moore's attack, the Secret Service had taken away her gun, but she bought another gun and was allowed to approach Ford outside the St. Francis Hotel. She didn't know that her new gun fired high and to the right.

In that same hotel last year, Secret Service agents were briefed on the results of a study by the Service's Protective Intelligence Division. The Service studied all 83 people who tried to kill a public official or celebrity in the United States in the last 50 years.

Assassins, the team found, fit no profile. They rarely threaten. They often change targets. Even if mentally ill, they plan rationally. But because they follow a path toward violence—stalking, acquiring weapons, communicating, acting in ways that concern those around them—it may be possible to intervene.

As the team presented its findings around the country, its audience often made connections to other kinds of targeted violence: workplace attacks, stalking and school shootings.

School violence decreased in the 1990s, but the rare school shootings increased. And then came Columbine High School, where 15 died.

The Service established the National Threat Assessment Center, a sliver of the Secret Service headquarters, just around the corner from Ford's Theater in Washington.

Nathaniel Brazill, 13, killed a teacher this year at Lake Worth Middle School in Florida after being sent home for playing with water balloons. Killers don't fit any particular profile, including a racial one.

"My hope," said the director of the Secret Service, Brian L. Stafford, "is that the knowledge and expertise utilized by the Secret Service to protect the president may aid our nation's schools and law enforcement communities to safeguard our nation's children."

Kids are kids, of course, not presidential assassins. Fewer of the school shooters show signs of mental illness, which often starts in late adolescence or beyond. The children talk more with peers, perhaps testing and probing for the reaction their action will bring.

After seeing that the young shooters didn't just snap, the researchers believe that more responsibility for the shootings rests with adults.

"If kids snap, it lets us off the hook," said Bryan Vossekuil, a former agent on President Ronald Reagan's protective detail and executive director of the Service's threat assessment center.

"If you view these shooters as on a path toward violence, it puts the burden on adults. Believing that kids snap is comforting."

Although there is no profile, the shooters do share one characteristic.

"I believe they're all boys because the way we bring up boys in America predisposes them to a sense of loneliness and disconnection and sadness," said William S. Pollack, a psychologist and consultant to the Secret Service.

"When they have additional pain, additional grievances, they are less likely to reach out and talk to someone, less likely to be listened to. Violence is the only way they start to feel they can get a result." ■

Secret Service findings overturn stereotypes

By Bill Dedman
Chicago Sun-Times

Here are preliminary findings from the Secret Service's study of 41 school shooters in 37 incidents.

The Secret Service shared the findings with the Sun-Times, without confidential information from the files. The Sun-Times selected quotations from public records to illustrate the findings.

ASSOCIATED PRESS

School shooters don't just snap. They aren't loners. Few have mental illnesses. And other children who know what's coming often don't tell.

PLANNING

They don't "snap." These attacks were neither spontaneous nor impulsive. In almost all cases, the attacker developed the idea in advance. Half considered the attack for at least two weeks and had a plan for at least two days.

Two years before the shootings at Columbine near Littleton, Colo., Dylan Klebold wrote in his journal, "I'll go on my killing spree against anyone I want."

One student showed his friends four bullets: three for people he hated and one for himself. And that's just how he used them.

CONCERN

Almost all attackers had come to the attention of someone (school officials, police, fellow students) for disturbing behavior. One student worried his friends by talking often of putting rat poison in the cheese shakers at a pizza restaurant. Others wrote poems about homicide and suicide.

Adults usually didn't investigate, remaining unaware of the depth of the problem. Few of the boys had close relationships with adults. Few participated in organized sports or other group activities.

Q. Where were the grown-ups?

A. Luke Woodham in Pearl, Miss., recalls, "Most of them didn't care. I just felt like nobody cared. I just wanted to hurt them or kill them."

Before Columbine, the local sheriff had been given copies of Eric Harris' Web site, describing his pipe bombs, with page after page of threats: "You all better f—— hide in your houses because im comin for EVERYONE soon, and I WILL be armed to the f—— teeth and I WILL shoot to kill and I WILL F—— KILL EVERYTHING."

COMMUNICATION

They aren't "loners." In more than three-fourths of the cases, the attacker told someone about his interest in mounting an attack at school. In more than half of the incidents, the attacker told more than one person. Some people knew detailed information, while others knew "something spectacular" was going to happen on a particular date. These communications were usually with friends or schoolmates; in only two cases was the confidant an adult. In fewer than

one-fourth of the cases did the attacker make a direct threat to the target.

"I'm going to kill her sometime today or tomorrow," a student warned.

BYSTANDERS

Those who knew in advance sometimes encouraged the attack and sometimes urged an escalation of the plan, but only rarely told anyone or shared their concern with others before the attack. In about one-third of the cases, the attack was influenced or dared by others or a group.

A friend of Harris asked him what he was going to do with bomb-making equipment. "He said he was going to blow up the school."

A friend of one shooter was told what would happen. "I was his friend. Calling someone would have been a betrayal. It just didn't seem right to tell."

MENTAL ILLNESS

Few shooters had been diagnosed with a mental illness, or had histories of drug or alcohol abuse. But more than half had a history of feeling extremely depressed or desperate. About three-fourths either threatened to kill themselves, made suicidal gestures or tried to kill themselves before the attack. Six killed themselves during the attack.

Luke Woodham's journal: "I am not insane. I am angry. I am not spoiled or lazy, for murder is not weak and slow-witted, murder is gutsy and daring. . . . I killed because people like me are mistreated every day. . . . I am malicious because I am miserable."

Woodham says now, "I didn't really see my life going on any further. I thought it was all over with. . . . I couldn't find a reason not to do it."

MOTIVES

Many shooters had more than one motive. The most frequent motivation was revenge. More than three-fourths were known to hold a grievance, real or imagined, against the target and/or others. In most cases, this was the first violent act against the target.

In his journal, Kip Kinkel of Springfield, Ore., wrote, "Hate drives me. . . . I am so full of rage. . . . Everyone is against me. . . . As soon as my hope is gone, people die."

Eric Houston: "My HATEtrid tord humanity forced me to do what I did. . . . I know parenting had nothing to do with what happens today. It seems my sanity has slipped away and evil taken it's place. . . . And if I die today please bury me somewhere beautiful."

"My HATEtrid tord humanity forced me to do what I did ... I know parenting had nothing to do with what happens today. It seems my sanity has slipped away and evil taken it's place..."

Eric Houston

PROBLEM SOLVING

Many saw the attack as a way to solve a problem. Bullying was common. Two-thirds of the attackers described feeling persecuted, bullied or threatened—not teasing but torment. Other problems they were trying to solve: a lost love, an expulsion or suspension, even a parent planning to move the family.

Loukaitis: "Some day people are going to regret teasing me."

"I just remember life not being much fun," a shooter recalls. " 'Reject, retard, loser.' I remember 'stick boy' a lot, 'cause I was so thin."

Houston: "Maybe to open up somebody's eyes to see some of the stuff that goes on, . . . of how the school works, and make them understand a little bit some of the stuff I went through."

STRESS

In more than three-fourths of the incidents, the attackers had difficulty coping with a major change in a significant relationship or loss of status, such as a lost love or a humiliating failure.

Woodham: "I actually had somebody I loved and somebody that loved me for the first time in my life, the only time in my life. And then she just, all of a sudden one day she broke up with me and I was devastated, I was going to kill myself."

TARGETS

These weren't rampage killers. Many of the killers made lists of targets, even testing different permutations of the order of the killing. Students, principals and teachers—all could be targets. In about half of the cases, someone in addition to the target was attacked. In half of the incidents, the actions appeared designed to maximize the number of victims.

Scott Pennington said he did not dislike his English teacher, Deanna McDavid, whom he killed in 1993 in Grayson, Ky. His writings had concerned her; she shared her concern with the school board, which told her it was his family's responsibility to get him help.

VIOLENCE

Most were not bullies, were not frequently in fights, were not victims of violence, had not harmed animals. Six in 10 showed interest in violent themes in media, games, or, more frequently, their own writings. Scott Pennington said he read Stephen King's "Rage," about a school murder, after his killing, not before as has been reported.

WEAPONS

Getting weapons was easy. Most of the attackers were able to take guns from their homes or friends, buy them (legally or illegally), or steal them. Some received them as gifts from parents. More than half had a history of gun use, although most did not have a "fascination" with weapons.

"F— you Brady," Eric Harris wrote in his journal about the Brady gun law. "All I want is a couple of guns and thanks to your f—— bill I will probably not get any! Come on, I'll have a clean record and I only want them for personal protection. It's not like I'm some psycho who would go on a shooting spree."

POLICE

Most incidents were brief. Almost two-thirds of the attacks were resolved before police arrived. The attacker was stopped by a student or staff member, decided to stop on his own, or killed himself. SWAT teams would not have helped. In only three cases did police discharge their weapons.

Q. Would metal detectors have stopped you?

A. Luke Woodham: "I wouldn't have cared. What's it going to do? I ran in there holding the gun out. I mean, people saw it. It wasn't like I was hiding it. I guess it could stop some things. But by the time somebody's already gotten into the school with a gun, it's usually gonna be just about too late." ■

Tips on listening to boys

By Bill Dedman
Chicago Sun-Times

William S. Pollack has practiced listening to boys.

He is the author of the best-selling books *Real Boys* and *Real Boys' Voices*, and assistant professor of psychology at Harvard Medical School. Pollack is a consultant to the Secret Service on its study of school shootings.

"Obviously, school shooters are the tip of an iceberg. That's the bad news.

"The good news is that when you can get boys to open up and talk to you, boys yearn to talk. What comes from the Secret Service results and my research is that we shouldn't be looking at all boys as criminals, yet we should be looking at boys in general as more disconnected than we thought. They want to know: 'Why can't you hear our pain?'"

His tips for listening:

- Honor a boy's need for "timed silence," to choose when to talk.
- Find a safe place, a "shame-free zone."
- Connect through activity or play. Many boys express their deepest experience through "action talk."
- Avoid teasing and shaming.
- Make brief statements and wait; do not lecture.
- Share your own experiences (if relevant). It lets your boy know he is not alone with issues.
- Be quiet and really listen with complete attention.
- Convey how much you admire and care about and love the boy.
- Give boys regular, undivided attention and listening space.
- Don't prematurely push him to be "independent."
- Encourage the expression of a full and wide range of emotions.
- Let him know that real men do cry and speak.
- Express your love as openly as you might with a girl.
- When you see aggressive or angry behavior, look for the pain behind it. ■

Bullying, tormenting often led to revenge

These cases of school shootings were studied by the Secret Service. The names and details here come from public records.

Bill Dedman
Chicago Sun-Times

Anthony Barbaro, 18, Olean, N.Y., Dec. 30, 1974. Honor student brought guns and homemade bombs to school, set off the fire alarm, and shot at janitors and firemen who responded. SWAT team found him asleep, with headphones playing "Jesus Christ Superstar." Hanged himself while awaiting trial.

John Christian, 13, Austin, Texas, May 19, 1978. Son of George Christian, former press secretary to LBJ, honor student, shot and killed teacher.

Robin Robinson, 13, Lanett, Ala., Oct. 15, 1978. After a disagreement with a student, he was paddled by the principal. He returned to school with a gun; when told he would be paddled again, he shot and wounded the principal.

James Alan Kearbey, 14, Goddard, Kan., Jan. 21, 1985. Killed the principal and wounded three others in his junior high school. Said he was bullied and beaten by students for years.

Kristofer Hans, 14, Lewiston, Mont., Dec. 4, 1986. Failing French, tried to kill the teacher but shot and killed her substitute. Injured a vice principal and two students. Had threatened to kill the French teacher.

Nathan Faris, 12, DeKalb, Mo., March 2, 1987. Teased about his chubbiness, Faris shot a classmate, then shot himself to death.

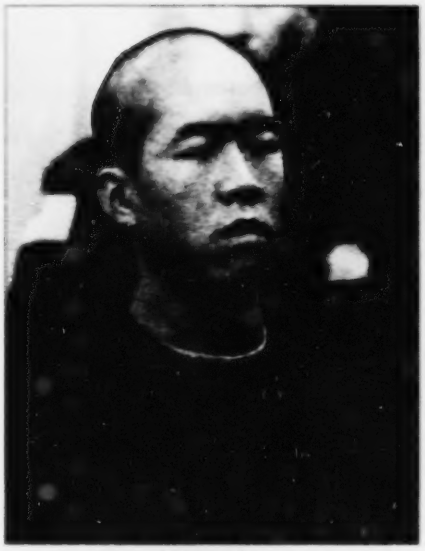
Nicholas Elliott, 16, Virginia Beach, Va., Dec. 16, 1988. Went to school with a semiautomatic pistol, 200 rounds of ammunition and three firebombs. He wounded one teacher, killed another and fired on a student who had called him a racist name.

Cordell "Cory" Robb, 15, Orange County, Calif., Oct. 5, 1989. Took kids hostage in drama class with a shotgun and semiautomatic pistol with the goal of getting his stepfather to school so he could kill him; the stepfather planned to move the family. Shot a student who taunted him. Had told several students what he planned.

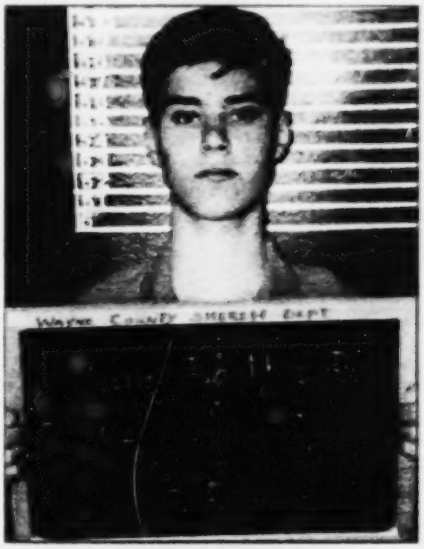
Eric Houston, 20, Olivehurst, Calif., May 1, 1992. Former student was upset over losing a job because he had not graduated. Killed three students and a social studies teacher who had given him a failing grade; injured 13 people. Held students hostage.

John McMahan, 14, Napa, Calif., May 14, 1992. Bullied by other boys, he opened fire with a .357 in first period science class, wounding two students.

Wayne Lo, 18, Great Barrington, Mass., Dec. 14, 1992. At an exclusive college-prep boarding school, Lo killed two people and wounded four others. School administrators knew he had received a package from an ammo company and had decided to let him keep it. A student tried to



Wayne Lo
Great Barrington, Mass.



Jonathan Moore
Patterson, Mo.

warn counselors.

Scott Pennington, 17, Grayson, Ky., Jan. 18, 1993. Held his high school English class hostage after killing his teacher and killing a custodian.

Leonard McDowell, 21, Wauwatosa, Wis., Dec. 1, 1993. Former student killed an associate principal who had handled his long history of disciplinary problems.

Clay Shrout, 17, Union, Ky., May 26, 1994. Killed his family, then sat in class with a gun before surrendering.

Nicholas Atkinson, 16, Greensboro, N.C., Oct. 12, 1994. Suspended student shot and wounded assistant principal, killed himself.

Chad Welcher, 16, Manchester, Iowa, Nov. 8, 1994. Fired two shotgun blasts into the principal's office, hitting a secretary.

John Sirola, 14, Redlands, Calif., Jan. 23, 1995. Shot principal in the face and shoulder; died of self-inflicted wound, which may have been accidental.

Toby Sincino, 16, Blackville, S.C., Oct. 12, 1995. Sincino was picked on by students. A week before the shooting, he had been suspended for making an obscene gesture. He shot and wounded a math teacher, killed another math teacher, then killed himself.

Jamie Rouse, 17, Lynnville, Tenn., Nov. 15, 1995. Upset over failing grade, fired at teachers, killing one, wounding another. When firing at a third teacher, he hit a female student, who died. Had told five friends that he planned to bring the rifle to school.

Barry Loukaitis, 14, Moses Lake, Wash., Feb. 2, 1996. Walked into algebra class with a hunting rifle, two handguns and 78 rounds of ammunition. Killed the teacher and two students, wounded a third. One of the students killed had teased him.

Name and location withheld by investigators, 16, Feb. 8, 1996. Wounded a student and killed himself. He had tried to commit suicide in the past. Other students knew he had been asking for a gun but didn't report it.

Anthony Gene Rutherford, 18; **Jonathan Dean Moore,** 15; **Joseph Stanley Burris,** 15; Patterson, Mo., March 25, 1996. The three killed a student at a rural Christian school for troubled youths. They thought he might intervene in an attack they planned on the school.

David Dubose Jr., 16, Scottsdale, Ga., Sept. 25, 1996. A student at the school for less than a week, Dubose shot and killed a teacher.

Evan Ramsey, 16, Bethel, Alaska, Feb. 19, 1997. Killed the principal and one student, wounding two, with a shotgun. Had told many students what he would do.

Luke Woodham, 16, Pearl, Miss., Oct. 1, 1997. Killed his mother, then killed two students and wounded seven. Was urged on by other boys.

Michael Carneal, 14, West Paducah, Ky., Dec. 1, 1997. Used a stolen pistol to kill three students and wound five in a prayer group, including his ex-girlfriend.

Joseph "Colt" Todd, 14, Stamps, Ark., Dec. 15, 1997. Shot two students. Said he was humiliated by teasing.

Mitchell Johnson, 13, and **Andrew Golden,** 11, Jonesboro, Ark., March 24, 1998. The pair killed four female students and a teacher after pulling the fire alarm. They had stolen the guns from Golden's grandfather.

Andrew Wurst, 14, Edinboro, Pa., April 25, 1998. Killed a teacher and wounded three students at a dinner-dance. He had talked of killing people and taking his own life.

Jacob Davis, 18, Fayetteville, Tenn., May 19, 1998. An honor student three days before graduation, Davis used a rifle to shoot another boy in a dispute over a girl.

Kip Kinkel, 15, Springfield, Ore., May 21, 1998. After being expelled for bringing a gun to school, Kinkel killed his parents, then two students in the cafeteria, wounding 25. Father had given him the Glock.

Shawn Cooper, 16, Notus, Idaho, April 16, 1999. He rode the bus to school with a shotgun wrapped in a blanket. He pointed the gun at a secretary and students, then shot twice into a door and at the floor. He had a death list, but told one girl he wouldn't hurt anyone. He surrendered.

Eric Harris, 17, and **Dylan Klebold,** 18, near Littleton, Colo., April 20, 1999. The pair killed 12 students and one teacher, wounded 23 students, and killed themselves. They had planned far more carnage at Columbine High School, spreading 31 explosive devices. They had detailed plans, including hand signals for "use bomb" and "suicide (point to head w gun)."

Thomas Solomon, 15, Conyers, Ga., May 20, 1999. Fired at the legs and feet of students, injuring six. Had turned sullen after being dumped by his girlfriend, and had talked of bringing a gun to school.

Victor Cordova Jr., 12, Deming, N.M., Nov. 19, 1999. Shot a student in the head, killing her.

Seth Trickey, 13, Fort Gibson, Okla., Dec. 6, 1999. Wounded four students outside Fort Gibson Middle School.

Nathaniel Brazill, 13, Lake Worth, Fla., May 26, 2000. Had been sent home for horseplay with water balloons on the last day of school. Returned with a gun and killed a teacher. ■

PART 2
MONDAY, OCTOBER 16, 2000

Schools may miss mark on preventing violence

Secret Service researchers find educators' approaches to keeping students from killing may do more harm than good; they recommend simply listening to children and improving school climates.

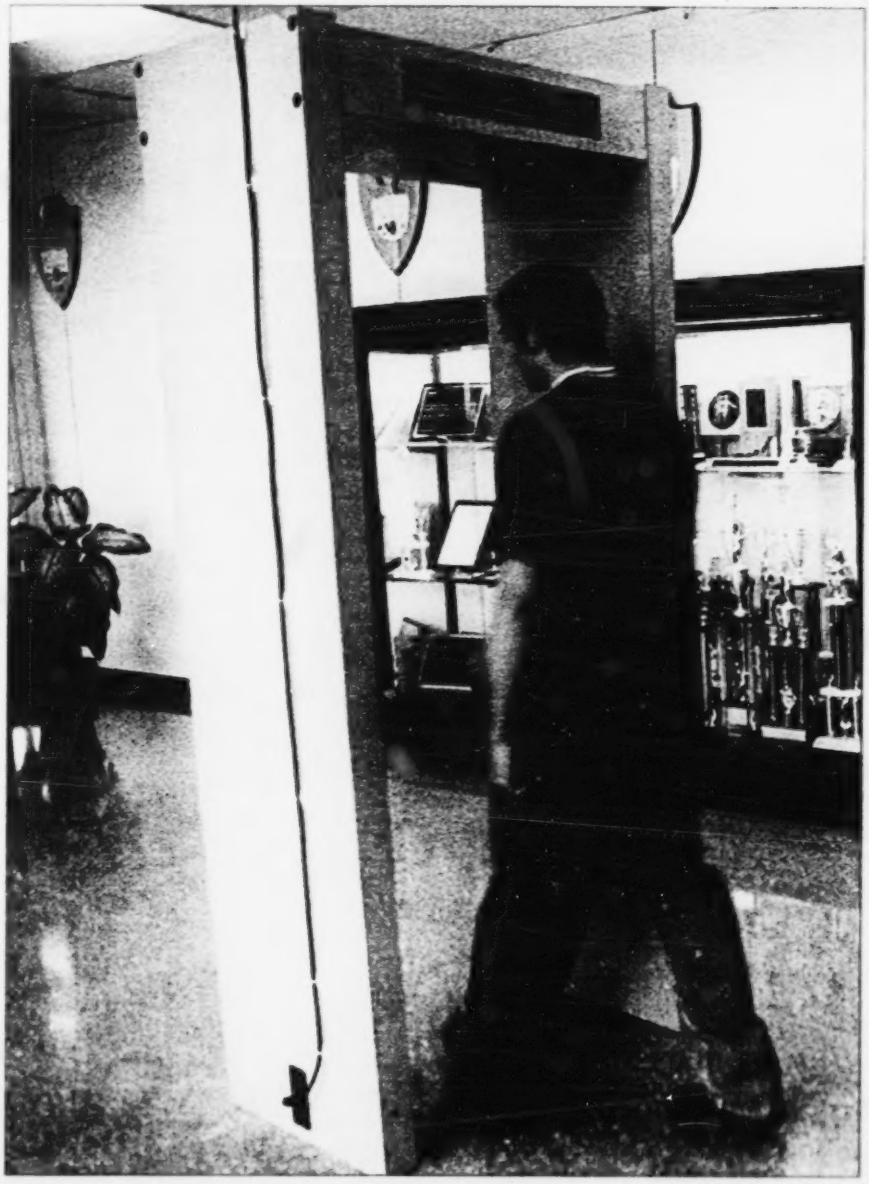
By Bill Dedman
Chicago Sun-Times

WASHINGTON – After the carnage last year at Columbine High School, the nation's schools have been bombarded with ways to "prevent" school shootings: metal detectors, SWAT teams, profiles, warning signs, checklists, zero-tolerance policies, even software to compare a student's actions with past attacks.

These approaches are "unlikely to be helpful" and could be dangerous, warn the Secret Service researchers who have studied school shootings. In the draft of an academic paper shared with the Chicago Sun-Times, the researchers and their academic colleagues warn of over-reliance on quick fixes.

"There is a tremendous amount of confusion," said William Modzeleski, a co-author of the paper and official with the U.S. Department of Education. "We need to be more skeptical consumers."

The researchers encourage principals and teachers to listen to children, improve climates in schools, and investigate thoroughly whenever a child causes concern.



RICK HEINZON-TIMES

Walking through a metal detector is part of the daily routine for many students in Chicago Public Schools.

Why rely on SWAT teams, they ask, when most attacks are over before police arrive?

Why focus on which kids fit a profile or show warning signs, when there is no profile that fits all those who kill?

Why expel students immediately for the most minor infractions, when expulsion was just the spark that pushed some students to come right back to school with a gun?

Why buy software to evaluate threats, when the killers rarely make direct threats, and the software isn't based on a study of school shootings?

Why rely on metal detectors and police officers in schools, when the shooters often make no effort to conceal their weapons?

"It is misleading to think that magnetometers are going to stop this problem," said Secret Service psychologist Marisa Reddy. She wrote the paper with Bryan Vossekuil, Robert A. Fein and John Berglund of the Secret Service; psychologist Randy Borum of the University of South Florida; and Modzeleski, director of the Safe and Drug-Free Schools Program of the Department of Education.

"Most of what's been done has been based on Columbine, when in fact Columbine was exceptionally rare," Modzeleski said. "You can't just slough this off on law enforcement. We've had 40 shooting cases in 30 years. We have a million cases of bad behavior daily in schools. Those can't be ignored."

The Secret Service researchers said that most responses to school shootings have been inductive, relying on aggregate information about past cases to guide inferences about specific facts in a given case.

They urge a more investigative, deductive approach, focusing on the facts.

The researchers warn against hasty use of these approaches:

Lt. Don Milazzo displays some materials that people have tried to sneak by metal detectors.

PROFILES

Profiles are not specific enough, failing to discern which students pose a threat. Many school shooters studied by the Secret Service would not have been identified by any profile.

Profiling can unfairly label or stigmatize students who stand out because of dress or musical interests or other characteristics.

And profiles are often based on media accounts, which proved to be inaccurate when compared with case files. One academic paper identified all "schoolhouse avengers" as white, when three have been African-American, one Hispanic and one Native Alaskan.

WARNING SIGNS AND CHECKLISTS

Since there have been so few school shootings, it would be easy to ignore a child just because he didn't fit the known "pre-incident indicators" on checklists distributed to schools. And a child showing more "warning signs" may be no more at risk for violence than a child showing none.

SOFTWARE

The lightning rod for much attention after Columbine has been a software tool, MAST, or Mosaic for Assessment of Student Threats.

A principal or teacher answers a series of questions, and Mosaic "tells the user whether the case contains factors and combinations of factors experts associate with escalation" of violence. The software would sell for about $1,200 per year per user.

"The free enterprise system is alive and well and stimulated by American tragedy," said Wesley C. Mitchell, the chief of police for the Los Angeles schools.

Cook County State's Attorney Richard Devine has been among Mosaic's champions.

"It's one tool. It's not the be all and end all," said Pam Paziotopoulos, Devine's public affairs director. "I don't think it's such a bad thing, as long as we use it with discretion."

While the Secret Service does not take a position on any commercial product, its researchers note that MAST is not based on a study of the actual cases of school shootings, but on expert opinion and a broader look at various kinds of school violence.

Mosaic's designer, Gavin de Becker, will not say how factors are weighted, but defends the software as useful for guiding inquiries when a student causes concern.

The Secret Service work "is of great value in informing us about the process that led to violence in the students they studied," de Becker said. The solution is not only "MAST or some other approach; all of the methods work together." ■

Shooters usually tell friends what they are planning

By Bill Dedman
Chicago Sun-Times

WASHINGTON — Evan Ramsey is the kid who told everyone.

He killed his principal and a student when he was 16 years old, in Bethel, Alaska. And a crowd gathered in the library balcony to watch.

"I'd called three people and asked them to go up to the library," Ramsey says. "[Two boys] told [one boy's] sister what was going to happen, and I guess she called some of her friends, and eventually there was something like two dozen people up in the library."

In its study of school shooters, the Secret Service found that attackers often tell their friends, directly or obliquely, what they are planning. But rarely do those friends tell an adult.

Ramsey described his friends' reaction, in portions of his Secret Service interview shared with Congress.

Q. "If the principal," Ramsey was asked, "had called you in and said, 'This is what I'm hearing,' what would you have said?"

A. "I would have told him the truth."

U.S. SECRET SERVICE

Evan Ramsey, who shot and killed his school principal and another student in 1997 in Bethel, Alaska, told friends he planned to shoot someone at the school, but they kept quiet. Portions of his interview with the Secret Service were shared with Congress.

In Chicago, the pattern was repeated last week, when a student at Simeon High School killed himself after shooting and wounding his former girlfriend. It didn't happen at school, but kids at school weren't surprised.

"I went to the school," said Paul Vallas, CEO of the Chicago Public Schools, "and students told me that he had talked about it. One student said he talked about killing somebody. And he had talked about suicide. No one told an adult."

Improved communication between children and adults is the main suggestion made by the Secret Service researchers and their collaborators at the Department of Education. They caution against overreliance on physical security.

Chicago schools have walk-through metal detectors in high schools and junior highs, and hand-held ones in elementary schools, because so many young children bring to school guns they find at home (11 last year).

"As much attention as we've focused on metal detectors," Vallas said, "we've spent an equal amount of time focusing on awareness, telling our teachers to report anything they hear, encouraging our parents and students to report

anything they hear."

Ramsey's description of his shooting at Bethel Regional High School in 1997 mirrors the study of school shootings, especially in the role played by bullying and bystanders.

On the morning of Feb. 1, 1997, Ramsey went to school with a shotgun in his baggy jeans. Bethel is a remote town, accessible only by plane or ship, with only about six hours of light a day during winter months.

He had been bullied by other boys. He had tried to get the school administrators to put a stop to it, but they hadn't acted.

Q. "What did the school do?"

A. "For a while they would go and talk to the person and tell them to leave me alone. But after a while, they just started telling me to ignore them."

During the two weeks that he considered the attack, Ramsey was encouraged by one boy and egged on by another. When Ramsey told his friends he would take a gun to school to scare his tormentors, another told him he would have to shoot to get their attention. He made a list of three targets; friends suggested 11 others.

He hadn't planned to shoot the principal, Ramsey said, but one of his friends who hated the principal encouraged him to put the principal on "the list."

On the day of the attack, Ramsey says, "It was kind of an avalanche. You know, an avalanche starts with something small and builds up."

Q. "Why the school?"

A. "That's where most of my pain and suffering was. I figured since the principal and the dean weren't doing anything that was making any impression, that I was gonna have to do something, or else I was gonna keep on getting picked on."

He is serving two 100-year sentences.

"I would tell you, if you think the pain you're feeling now is lots, the aftereffects will be worse. ... I wish I hadn't done it. Nobody should have to deal with that kind of pain." ■

Secret Service offers suggestions

By Bill Dedman
Chicago Sun-Times

Based on their study of school shooters, Secret Service researchers and the Department of Education offer suggestions for schools and parents.

"Because information about these attackers' intent and planning was potentially knowable before the incident, some attacks may be preventable," the Secret Service says.

"However, because the time span between the attacker's decision to mount an attack and the actual event may be short, quick responses are necessary."

• Understand that violence is the end result of a process, which is understandable and often discernable. Students don't snap.

• There are no accurate or useful profiles of school shooters. Focus on thinking and behavior, not traits.

• Targeted violence stems from an interaction among attacker, situation, setting, and target. Pay attention to the role of bystanders, people who know what is going to happen.

• Use an investigative mind-set. Rely on the facts of this specific case. Corroborate key information. Investigate communications. Talk to the circle of friends. Investigate weapon-seeking.

• Each case is different. Each requires an individual, fact-based approach.

• Reduce barriers to students telling what they know.

• Because many students brought in guns from home, consider issues of safe gun storage.

• Don't look only for threats. Many students who posed a threat did not threaten.

• Improve handling of grievances.

"Bullying was not a factor in every case, and clearly not every child who is bullied in school will pose a risk for targeted violence in school. However, in a number of cases, attackers described experiences of being bullied in terms that approached torment.

"They told of behaviors that, if they occurred in the workplace, would meet the legal definitions of harassment. That bullying played a major role in a number of these school shootings supports ongoing efforts to combat bullying in American schools." ■

SUN-TIMES EDITORIAL

Teens need to talk; we need to listen

When images of teen hatred march across our television screens and newspapers, we grab our kids a little closer and wonder what in the world is going on. The Secret Service wondered, too, and did an analysis of school shootings. There's no comfort in the agency's conclusion: There is no simple answer. But that is not to say we are powerless in preventing Columbine-like school shootings. One convicted teen shooter summed up the agency's recommendation: "Pay attention."

The Secret Service's study, which was shared with the Sun-Times in the Sunday and Monday editions, showed that while there is no profile for the average teenage assassin, there are similarities in many of the cases. The report makes a compelling argument that schools cannot ignore bullies. Bullying is not always just a passage of adolescence but, for some on the receiving end, it's torture. Many of the kid killers told Secret Service investigators that feelings of alienation or persecution drove them to violence.

Young shooters often were open about their intentions. Either through their general behavior or, in some cases, actually talking about their planned mayhem, they presented red flags that were ignored. Granted, it can be tough to get through the emotional wall erected by some teens, but adults must try. Students can have a proactive role, too. The report found that would-be killers often confide their plans to peers. Schools need to develop programs to teach students that revealing aberrant behavior by a fellow student is not a violation of a generational code of silence but a necessary action that could save lives. School administrators need to make sure their programs have credibility with students. Teens probably are suspicious of zero-tolerance policies that cannot differentiate between a deadly 9mm weapon and a squirt gun.

Finally, there is the gun issue. It was clear that in many of the school shootings, teens had easy access to weapons. Some criminologists link efforts to take guns out of the hands of juveniles to an overall drop in violent crime. It seems obvious but needs repeating: Gun control laws are necessary to keep deadly weapons away from emotionally volatile teens.

Though there are no easy answers, the Secret Service report concluded, "Some attacks may be preventable." It just takes a lot of work. ■

CONTACTS AND FURTHER READING ON SCHOOL SHOOTINGS

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U.S. Department of Education
Safe and Drug Free Schools Program

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- E-mail: safeschl@ed.gov
- www.ed.gov/offices/OESE/SDFS

Center for the Prevention of School Violence

- www.ncsu.edu/cpsv

Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence,
"Violence in American Schools"

- www.colorado.edu/cspv/research/violenceschools.html

"The Appropriate and Effective Use of Security Technologies in U.S. Schools,"
U.S. departments of energy and justice

- www.doe.gov/schoolsecurity/pdf.htm

MIDWEST'S BEST-READ NEWSPAPER

Chicago Sun-Times